Michael Flatley



Photo courtesy Andrew Maloney



Michael was born in Batley on 15 Jan 1916, the son of John and Catherine Flatley nee Cooney who had married in the latter part of 1903. John was born in Co. Mayo as were Catherine's parents, although she was born in Batley.

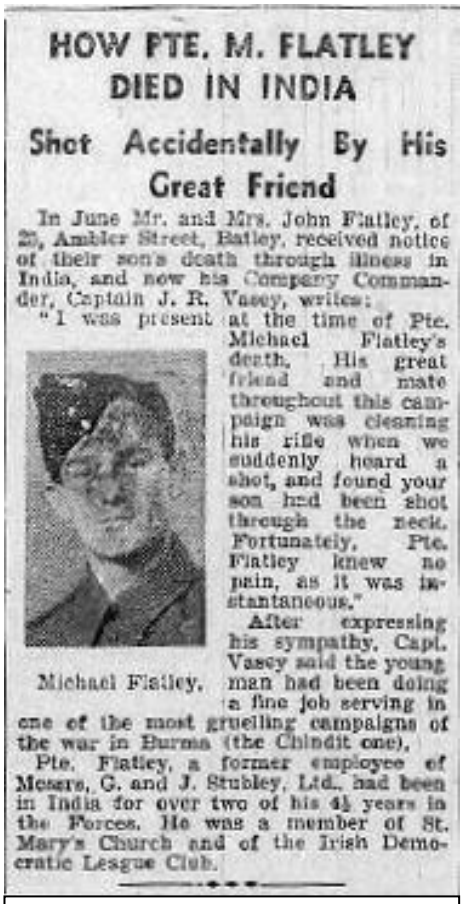
Patrick was born in March 1904 died Sept 1904 followed by William born May 1905 died aged 7 days, Mary (Annie) in August 1906 survived 2 days, Mary born August 1907 died July 1908, Catherine 1908, Elizabeth 1910-October 1911, John 1911 died aged 19 days, Mary Ann born January 1913 died September aged 8 months, John April 1917- May 1918, John 1920, Norah 1921-1996 and Mary Anne 1922.

In 1911 John and Catherine were living at 25, Ambler Street, Batley with her parents and there were five adults and two children in a two-roomed home.

In 1939 the family was living at Cooper Street, near Ambler Street, Batley.

Michael worked at Messrs. G. & J. Stubley Ltd., Bottoms Mill, Batley. He was a member of St. Mary's Church and of the Irish Democratic League Club.

He joined the Forces in early 1940 and had served in India since around October 1942. Michael was involved with one of the most gruelling campaigns of the war in Burma (Chindits).



HOW PTE. M. FLATLEY DIED IN INDIA

Shot Accidentally By His Great Friend

In June Mr. and Mrs. John Flatley, of 20, Ambler Street, Batley, received notice of their son's death through illness in India, and now his Company Commander, Captain J. R. Vasey, writes:

"I was present at the time of Pte. Michael Flatley's death. His great friend and mate throughout this campaign was cleaning his rifle when we suddenly heard a shot, and found your son had been shot through the neck. Fortunately, Pte. Flatley knew no pain, as it was instantaneous."

Michael Flatley.

After expressing his sympathy, Capt. Vasey said the young man had been doing a fine job serving in one of the most gruelling campaigns of the war in Burma (the Chindit one).

Pte. Flatley, a former employee of Messrs. G. and J. Stubley, Ltd., had been in India for over two of his 4½ years in the Forces. He was a member of St. Mary's Church and of the Irish Democratic League Club.

Batley News, 21 Oct 1944

The Chindits were the largest of all the allied special forces of the 2nd World Word. Formed and lead by Major-General Orde Wingate DSO, they fought behind enemy lines in Northern Burma during 1943 and 1944 in the War against Japan. They were unconventional due to their total reliance on airdrops for their supplies and complete dependence on wireless for communications. The Chindits would infiltrate deep behind the Japanese lines in Northern Burma. For many months they lived in and fought the enemy in the jungles of occupied Burma, hundreds of miles behind the Japanese forward positions.

Their mission was to raid the enemy's lines of communications, blowing bridges, railway tracks and blocking supply routes. They would harass the enemy to cause confusion, disrupt their plans and divert their resources. The Chindits were organised into columns with a strength of about 340. Each column was strong enough to defend itself and capable of mounting surprise attacks on enemy targets, yet small enough for concealment and for mobility to evade and slip through enemy nets. Columns would combine to strike larger targets and then disappear back into the jungle.

There were two Chindits expeditions into Burma, the first in February 1943, code-named Operation Longcloth, consisted of a force of 3,000 men who marched over 1,000 miles during the campaign. It was an experimental operation to prove British forces could operate many hundreds of miles from their own bases in the midst of Japanese controlled territory and to test Wingate's theories and to gain experience.

The 2nd expedition in March 1944 was on a much larger scale and consisted of a force of 20,000 men. They were given the name Special Force and was composed mainly of British battalions supplemented by Burma Rifles, Gurkha and Nigerian battalions and a company of Hong Kong volunteers.

In June 1944 John and Catherine received news that their son had died of illness in India. This was later changed with the arrival of a letter from his Company Commander, Captain J.R. Vasey who wrote: -

“I was present at the time of Private Flatley’s death. His great friend and mate throughout this campaign was cleaning his rifle when we suddenly heard a shot and found your son had been shot through the neck. Fortunately, Private Flatley knew no pain as it was instantaneous.”

Captain Vasey went on to express his sympathy and to say that Michael had been serving in one of the most gruelling campaigns in Burma.

Michael was originally buried in Sahmaw War Cemetery and according to the CWGC this was an original “Chindit” cemetery containing many of those who died in the battle for Myitkyina (17 May-3 August 1944. His body along with several other comrades, was exhumed in June 1954 for re-burial in the Taukkyan War Cemetery, Myanmar. Sahmaw was difficult to access and maintain.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group